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LETTER DATED 2 MARCH 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BURUNDI TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

The Security Council will doubtless have been informed of the convening at Gitega of the second round table on the Burundi peace process.

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the statement by the participants in the second round table, held at Gitega from 18 to 21 February 1998 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter, as well as the text of the statement annexed hereto, circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Gamaliel NDARUZANIYE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement by the participants in the second round table, held at Gitega from 18 to 21 February 1998

Having observed that the question of peace is a matter of urgency, and after a wide-ranging debate on related issues, the participants in the second round table, held at Gitega from 18 to 21 February 1998, decided to issue the following statement:

1. The Burundi people are today suffering a multidimensional crisis with security, political, economic, social and moral components. The crisis has taken on a broad ethnic dimension, so that the Burundi nation has been imperilled. The founding values of the nation seem to have been wrought asunder and there are disturbing indications casting doubt on the likelihood of there being a common future shared by the people of Burundi. This is of concern to the conscience of the people of Burundi and in particular its political figures.

2. However great the crisis and extent of the problems, we reaffirm our faith in the nation and elect to rebuild a unitary nation-State and to renew our commitment, voluntarily, to those values which, over the ages, have forged the old nation of Burundi.

3. To establish conditions and an environment propitious to the reconstruction of the nation, we must give priority to peace. Without peace, no proposals, political or socio-economic, can succeed. Institutions, organizations and political figures, all the people of Burundi, have a heavy responsibility to surpass themselves to give the peace which the people of Burundi so need every chance. They must subordinate their activities, ambitions and beliefs to the compromises necessary for Burundi to rediscover lasting peace.

4. We make an appeal for the emergence of a broad movement for peace, melding together all opinions and activities to create conditions for lasting peace in our country. The quest for peace and security for all must be the primary mission of this Assembly.

5. Today a number of issues are being fiercely debated, it being the case that the people of Burundi have not achieved the degree of detachment necessary to forge consensus on these important subjects of conflict. We must overcome mistrust and fear and weave these issues into a fabric of dialogue for peace.

6. Concerning the peace process, we reaffirm that political dialogue is the best way to resolve the Burundi conflict. Nevertheless it is important to emphasize the central role of the internal peace process, since without a firm basis within the country there can be no real peace. Negotiations open to all the parties to the conflict must complement a fundamental internal dialogue laying the foundations for a future society. To create conditions which are propitious to dialogue, we recommend an end to the war.

7. Concerning the question of genocide, genocide has become a dramatic reality in Burundi and in the Great Lakes subregion. We affirm that no political or any other reason can justify the practice of genocide. Institutions, organizations and political figures must make a commitment to fight against ideology and genocidal practices and adopt practices for their eradication from Burundi and the subregion. It is essential to develop and consolidate an inter-ethnic resistance to genocide and a policy aimed at combating its ideology and practices, primarily through a far-reaching mass educational effort. The crime of genocide must be stamped out. To that end, we recommend the establishment of an international criminal court for Burundi.

8. Concerning the question of institutions and democracy, we reaffirm our commitment to design and establish a system of democracy suited to the actual situation in Burundi. Democracy, enshrining as it does the universal values of reason, peace and tolerance, is a system of government that can be used to ensure the safety of all and to rebuild the nation. We must devise a system of democracy that is derived from the actual situation obtaining in our country, divided as it is along ethnic lines. It is already apparent that, in contrast to systems characterized primarily by opposition and confrontation, we must emphasize the values of reason, consensus and good governance. Our goal is a democracy that will consolidate peace and the nation-State, will repudiate genocide, will not be exclusive, and will foster the participation of all citizens.

9. Concerning the question of security and the security forces, we note that the security of ordinary citizens does not necessarily follow automatically from that of the security forces. On the contrary, it stems to a far greater extent from institutional order and the political environment. We urge the security forces to reassure the people and strive constantly to win their confidence. That is the best way to ensure that backing peace is the proper course of action. In response to the concerns that have been expressed about the ethnic make-up of the security forces, we have recommended a progressive, realistic approach to the effort to develop an appropriate solution.

10. Concerning justice, we recommend effective action to ensure that crimes will not go unpunished, in particular through the development of an impartial, independent system of justice that will rigorously apply the law. A sound system of justice will be the foundation-stone of the State and of society, and will foster reconciliation. We note that the current controversy over justice is focused primarily on criminal justice relating to the crimes that were committed during the crisis. We recommend that close attention be devoted to that area of justice in order to avoid arbitrary arrests and unjustifiably long periods of preventive detention. We ask the country's institutions and political figures to trust and support the judiciary in order to help it carry out what is, in the present context, its difficult task.

11. Concerning the victims, we appeal to the Government and to civil society to strengthen their efforts to assist them, especially the multitude of widows and orphans produced by the crisis.

12. We appeal to the international community to provide the victims with assistance and to resume cooperation for reconstruction and development,

inasmuch as efforts in those areas will contribute to the success of the peace process and national recovery. We also ask the international community to support forces acting for peace, to manage the issue of the refugees in accordance with international conventions, ensuring that the refugees in question do not turn into forces of aggression against their country of origin, and to condemn and combat the ideology of genocide in the Great Lakes region. We demand an immediate and total end to the embargo that has been imposed on Burundi.

Lastly, the participants in the second Gitega round table appeal to the entire people to support the peace process by maintaining security and redoubling their efforts to increase production.

The participants also emphasized the importance of giving effect to their recommendations without delay.

Before going their separate ways, the participants solemnly pledged their own personal commitment as individuals to the recommendations adopted by the round table, and agreed to act accordingly.